**Cool Tools Review: Screencast O’Matic**

Screencast O’Matic is a tool that allows users to create a screen capture recording with a voiceover from the producer. The application creates a frame around the computer screen and any window within this frame will be recorded. Prior to recording, the user can select to have his or her voice or voice and face recorded. The “talking head” as Dr. Spires aptly termed it, will be placed in the bottom corner of the screen cast. The video can then be uploaded to a personal website or YouTube for the intended audience. The purpose of this tool is to allow learning to exist in asynchronous time. Once posted, the student could view the recording at any time of day to learn or review the material on his or her own schedule.

This application has significant potential for educators For example, a teacher could record a lecture while cycling through PowerPoint slides and post it to his website. This would enable absent students to catch up on missed class content or allow other students to clarify a confusing concept from the class. Additionally, teachers could use this tool to model steps of a digital inquiry project. Students could watch the teacher model the process and pause when necessary so that he or she could work a desirable pace.

The application for student creation is equally dynamic. Student could record their own presentations and post them to a class website or wiki. This process would have the dual benefit of cutting down on valuable class time for droning presentations while providing shy students a comfortable method of building speaking skills. Another application, which will be the focus of the mini-lesson, is allowing students to record themselves as they engage in an inquiry process. This fosters metacognative skills as students articulate their thought process while searching while also giving their peers or teacher a glimpse at how each child thinks.

While the benefits are numerous, there are several limitations. The recording is no true replacement for being in class. The child cannot ask the screen to clarify a point or pose a question to screen for greater understanding. Further, users are capped on their recording time to just 15 minutes, thus some lectures would have to be broken up. The process can also be time consuming for the teacher to set up, record, wait for the file to publish and upload. Finally, while the product is free, many features such as extended time (>15Minutes), editing and password protection of the videos all require the paid version of the product. Thankfully, the annual fee is just $15. In general, the benefits do outweigh these negatives.

Screen Cast O’Mattic Lesson

**Context:**

I am fortunate to work in an affluent school district where the vast majority of students read at or above grade level. The challenge for many of my 7th grade students is that they lack critical evaluation of online source materials. Many take an absolutist approach to research, believing that there is one site that has a definitive answer to questions they pose. Often times the analysis of the credibility of the site is superficial based on its Google popularity or the websites visual appeal. One of my greatest priorities as a teacher is to educate my students to detect author bias and how it shapes an individual or a group’s perspective on the truth. Knowing that they will be information seekers and synthesizers in their future (and current) lives, I feel it is vital to have a lesson that challenges a student to not only locate information on a topic, but also evaluate the source and potential bias of the information presented.

**Task/Scenario: Grade 7 Ancient History**

Guiding Questions:

1. How has Hammurabi’s Code Shaped the World We Live in today?”
2. What does outstanding source evaluation look like?

In the previous class, students will be introduced to Hammurabi’s Code of Law. Hammurabi was the king of the City of Babylon. Students will now attempt to answer the essential question “How has Hammurabi’s Code Shaped the World We Live in Today?” To explore that answer, they will search the net for websites that will help them to understand the impact of the code on future civilizations. The end product will be a student-selected method of sharing their new knowledge in the form of a paper, PowerPoint, video, podcast or any other mutually agreed upon method.

Our mini lesson will be a subsection of this project. While the content is important, the lasting lesson of this mini-lesson is the metacognative thinking about source evaluation. Using Screencast O’Matic, students will record their Internet search process and analyze the first source they believe will lead to a successful answer. They will be asked to think aloud while the screen cast is recorded and explain the choices they make in selecting a link, determining relevance and evaluating the author and potential bias. Students will be given a graphic organizer (Exhibit A) that they will use to guide their thinking in the process. The videos will then be posted to a class-specific YouTube Channel.

As a reflection piece for homework, students will be assigned to watch the screencast of two peers. In the comments section of each video they watch, they will score the video on a 1-5 based on the source evaluation handout. A student will be given 1 point for each criterion that is addressed in the screencast. The teacher would also review each video and score it 1-5. The class would discuss three sample videos in class the following day and outline the criteria for a successful Internet search.

**Purpose**

**Students Will Be Able To:**

* Discover at least one way in which Hammurabi’s Code shaped past and modern society.
* Analyze online text and evaluate the material for relevancy, author credibility, and bias.
* Think metacognatively about how they analyze sources and what effective source selection and evaluation looks and sounds like

**Standards:**

* Massachusetts History Frameworks: 7.11 Describe who Hammurabi was and explain the basic principle of justice in Hammurabi’s Code (“an eye for an eye”). (H, C, E)
* Massachusetts History Frameworks: 5. Identify multiple causes and effects when explaining historical events. (H)
* Massachusetts History Frameworks: **Civics and Government :**7. Define and use correctly words and terms relating to government such as *city-state, dynasty, kingdom, empire, republic, separation of powers, civic duty, rule of law,* and *military*. (C)
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient. Identity false statements and fallacious reasoning.

**Content**

* History Alive: The Ancient World Text. Section 6.4 The Babylonians—Background information.
* Screencast O’Matic: to record videos of student searches
* Student selected content from their search results in relation to Hammurabi’s Code

**Pedagogy:**

* **Teacher Modeling**: I would provide my own example of how I evaluated an internet source using Screencast O’Matic.
* **Inquiry Based Learning founded in an Essential Question**
* **Think Aloud:** Students are asked to explain each decision as they click through the website increasing metacognative thinking
* **Source Evaluation Check List:** A means of scaffolding the process so that students have a guide on how to approach the evaluation process.
* **Peer Review** of source evaluation videos providing each student with critical, independent feedback on the observed process.
* **Class discussion with warm and cool feedback:** All classmates will get to see and review a source evaluation with peers to discover best practices and new approaches.
* **Skill Building:** This activity can be applied to almost any unit of study so students can repeat the process and identify growth in this area.

**Assessment**

This task will be given a simple 1-5 score. Students will receive one point for each of the 5 areas of source evaluation they address. The five criteria are:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | Addressed (1point) | Not Addressed (0) |
| Author:  (Who Wrote it?) |  |  |
| Credentials:  (Why should I trust this person?) |  |  |
| Claim:  (What’s his or her idea about the topic?) |  |  |
| Evidence:  (How does the author support the claim?) |  |  |
| Bias:  (Does the author appear to be in favor or against ideas?) |  |  |
| Total Score: |  |  |